

Adventist Millennials of India: Strongly Connected to Church

Abstract

Background of the study: India has the largest youth population in the world that is poised to increase further in the coming decade. 70% of India's population is below the age of 35 years. The Indian youth population (15 – 24 Years) which is 232 million strong constitute one fifth of total population. The membership of SDA church currently put at 1,580,614 spread over 4,514 churches also reflects national trend with large youth population. This phenomenal rise in the youth population has given an opportunity called "demographic dividend". This study is undertaken to examine the quality of Adventist youth in India and to understand the youth's connection and devotion for supporting and strengthening the Adventist Church.

Method and Material: A survey questionnaire named "Adventist Youth Development Study" (AYDS) was developed in 2014. The AYDS looks into the health, family, spiritual development and wellbeing of young people in the age group of 15 to 35 years. The questionnaire is divided into 13 subscales comprehensively measuring Adventist young people's physical, mental and spiritual faculties. The total sample of 226 Adventist youth in the age group of 15 to 25 years (113 males and 113 females) attending the Southern Asia Division Youth Congress were examined in the cross sectional survey. The mean age of sample was 21.5 years. The sample comprised 62% late adolescents and 38% early adults. The demographic profile of the sample indicate that 82% single, 13% married and 3.5% engaged. 35% had completed graduate degree or above. 42% has completed grade 12 and 23% completed some certificate course.

Results: Reflecting the casual attitude of church in India to health message, 75% reported skipping their breakfast often, 79% don't take 8 hours of sleep and 70% usually snack instead of taking regular meals. About 46% were vegetarians resorting to lacto ovarian diet while 54% claimed to be meat eaters. With regard to problem behaviours 81% never smoked and 4% smoke regularly. Similarly while 93% reported never chewing tobacco about 7% reported chewing tobacco regularly. About 9% reported consuming alcohol even though 60% reported trying it sometime in life. Drug use was reported by 5% of youth. The mental health profile of youth states that 79% reported feeling depressed in their lives and 28% reported having thought of suicide.

Discussion and Conclusion: An overwhelming 85% said they are having very good daily spiritual experience. They report having love, peace, joy, and strength in their daily spiritual experience. With regard to church experience, more than half of the sample reported unpleasant church experience and felt that church is not caring and supportive enough. However, what is marvellous to note is that even though more than half reported unpleasant Church experience, unsupportive and uncaring Church, 95% report regular attendance in Church programs. This speaks of their commitment to be connected to their church and their strong devotion to God. There is a strong and urgent need to make use of this positive youth dividend to strengthen the Church for the future.